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"What New Doctrine is This?"

(Mark 1, 27.)

(From VOX POPULI, Lowell, Mass., Dec. 30, 1881.)

Years ago, Sydney H. Gay of New York, was moved to publish a history of this country, which book is now hawked in this vicinity as "Bryant's History of the U. S." The work was well written, but it showed many misapprehensions as to the early colonial history of the present Massachusetts. Recently, the same author has felt called upon to attempt, in the *Atlantic Monthly*, the construction of a new history of the Landing of the Pilgrims—a history based on ignorance of the locality described, on the misapprehension of one very plain record, the total overlooking of a second, and the suppression of a vital portion of a third. The *Atlantic* having found room for this effusion, declines to find room for a correction of its errors, saying that the subject has already been discussed in the Boston *Advertiser*. That is, the *Atlantic* having been made the vehicle of false history, refuses to admit a correction, but prescribes the *Advertiser* as an antidote. For such *Atlantic* readers as may not have the excellent remedy in question, we give below the article which was not allowed to follow Mr. Gay's misconceptions, or whatever else they may be called in view of his treatment of Bradford's record of Dec. 25, O. S., as described below.

"*When Did the Pilgrim Fathers Land at Plymouth?*"

Under this head, in November's *Atlantic*, Mr. S. H. Gay seeks to confute the common idea that the "Landing" commemorated on "Forefathers' Day," was on Dec. 11th, 1620, O. S., or the 21st, N. S. (The dates in this article will all be in Old Style, when not otherwise defined).

It is agreed on all hands that the Pilgrim explorers in their shallop, on Dec. 10th, 1620, spent their Sunday at Clark's Island in the outer harbor of Plymouth, and that on the 11th they examined some part of the inner harbor. The antiquaries of the Old Colony say that these explorers then sounded the especial harbor of Plymouth, that they landed upon Plymouth Rock, and decided the adjacent territory with its brooks and corn-fields, to be "the best they could find" for their new home.

Mr. Gay dissents from all this. He claims that the explorers confined their soundings to the waters near Clark's Island, and that their inspection of land was limited to the neighboring shores where now are Kingston and Duxbury. He therefore decides that on the day in question "nobody" landed on Plymouth Rock. He however alleges that on the 25th of that month, there was at the Rock a "final disembarkation of the whole company," "when for the first time the women seem to have left the ship at Plymouth"; he also says that they all then "landed to stay." This he sets forth as the true Landing of the Pilgrims. He therefore would persuade us to celebrate the event, if at all, on Jan. 4th, N. S.

Now this matter is not one of theory. Mourt's Relation contains a daily record, evidently kept by William Bradford, who was among the chief of the explorers; and in this the facts are set forth with admirable clearness. Bradford records of this Dec. 11th:—

"On Monday we sounded the harbor, and found it a very good harbor for our shipping. We marched also into the land, and found divers corn-fields and little running brooks; a place very good for situation."

In his large history he uses much the same language, with an addition, terming the spot "a place (as they supposed) fit for situation; at least, it was the best they could find."

The explorers then returning to Cape Cod, came back on the 16th, bringing their associates and their famous ship. The latter they took more than a quarter

of a mile within that natural breakwater known as "The Beach," mooring her as near Plymouth Rock as they safely could, although nearly a mile and a half away. No ship would even now be likely to find her way to that spot, unless the channel had been carefully sounded in advance. During the two days spent by the explorers on Clark's Island, low-water came near mid-day, and it revealed to even a casual glance, the vast flats along the opposite Kingston and Duxbury shores, and the unfitness for shipping of the whole vicinity of the Island. There was no need of sounding thereabouts. Moreover, Bradford says they did not go to "discover" in the Kingston region until eight days after. The fact of the May flower's entrance and anchorage, is pretty good evidence as to the direction of the sounding.

What land was examined at this first exploration? Not Kingston, for that was not visited until eight days later, and notwithstanding what Mr. Gay says of its nearness to Clark's Island, it was as far away as Plymouth; not Duxbury, for that was presumably covered with woods, and had none of the "little running brooks" mentioned. The spot was pronounced "*fit* for situation," and "*the best* they could find." What these explorers considered essential in a place for situation, is clearly shown by their journal. A few days later, when some favored Kingston, it was rejected because so wooded that the ground could not be cleared in time for the spring planting, and was indefensible from the Indians; when Clark's Island was advocated by some on account of its security, it was objected to because covered with woods and sparsely supplied with fresh water. Pamet had already been voted down chiefly because of its lack of fresh water, although it had good corn-fields and was "secure and defensible."

The whole circuit of Plymouth bay, there was but one place which combined the essentials they had just been seeking, viz. Pamet. The land adjacent to Plymouth Rock comprised the broad corn-fields of the then defunct Patuxets; it was watered by a remarkable series of "little running brooks" of fine water, while Kingston and Duxbury had nothing of the sort; it was defended in front by a tidal harbor, on the south by the strong barrier of Town Brook, on the west by Burial Hill, 165 ft. high; the remaining side was an open plain through which a line of palisade might easily be built so that the guns on the hill would cover it. For men seeking cleared land, fine fresh water, and natural defenses, combined, Plymouth was an excellent site, and the only one there! Bradford might have said in fewer words that this was the place selected by the explorers on December 11th, but he could hardly have said so more certainly.

A week later, the verdict of the twelve explorers was to be acted upon by the 28 of the brethren who had returned with them in the Mayflower. The pioneers would now be sure to take their associates, first of all, to the place already approved as "the *best* they could find." In fact, all of the first day of the view by the whole company (Dec. 18th), was devoted to a region where they found ancient corn-fields, "four or five small brooks of very sweet fresh water that all ran into the sea," and "the best water that ever we drank"; fish began to throng the brooks. The deposits of clay were worked, the sand and gravel beds found of good quality, eleven species of useful plants examined, the neighboring woods traversed and ten kinds of trees noticed. Why this minute investigation, when there were over twenty miles of harbor-shore yet unexamined? Evidently some very strong influence was holding the company to that place, and endeavoring to convince the doubters that it was "the best they could find." This again is a good description of the tract around Plymouth Rock, and of *no other possible place!* Going northerly from that landmark (which is close by a fine rivulet), the traveller finds five "little running brooks," filtering from the diluvial background, and they "all run into the sea," except where recently diverted; (one of them now finds its way thither through a pipe of 20 in. diameter). As before said, no such group of brooks as the Pilgrims' journal specifies, nor *any* such brooks, can be found at any other point around that bay. Mr. Gay asserts the contrary, but his map deceives him. The description of the 11th means Plymouth; this description of the 18th means Plymouth. We have yet another description.

On the 20th, it was voted to settle at Plymouth Rock. The journal says the settlement was to be "on the first place," where was much cleared land formerly in corn, and "many delicate springs of as good water as can be drank"; the small craft could be kept in "a very sweet brook" under the hill-side, where would be "much good fish in their seasons." Nobody doubts this means Plymouth, or that the "delicate springs" include "five little running brooks." The three descriptions have so much in common, that any one accustomed to compare evidence, will be sure to decide that all relate to the same place. Aside from that, the fact is positively proved by the "little running brooks"; they have washed the ground from under Mr. Gay's feet.

Now as to that "final disembarkation," that "true Forefathers' Day." On Dec. 20th, after Plymouth had been definitely selected, "about 20" remained on shore, and thenceforth the place was permanently inhabited. After a two-days' storm, so many as could, went on shore to work on the 23d, but at night they returned to the ship, leaving only the guard on land. Our critic makes the bold assertion, that on the next working-day the entire company landed and remained; and in support of this statement, the sole evidence he produces is this extract from their journal:

"Monday, the 25th day, we went on shore, some to fell timber, some to saw, some to rive, and some to carry; so no man rested all that day."

The reader will see that this in no wise sustains the idea of a "final disembarkation"; but he will be not a little surprised to learn that the above quotation is only a part of the entry in the journal, and that the suppressed portion contradicts Mr. Gay in direct language. Here is the full entry:

"Monday, the 25th day, we went on shore, some to fell timber, some to saw, some to rive, and some to carry; so no man rested all that day. But towards night, some as they were at work, heard a noise of some Indians, which caused us all to go to our muskets; but we heard no further. SO WE CAME ABOARD AGAIN, and left some 20 to keep the court of guard."

This restored record leaves room for no further talk about that "final disembarkation." Even without such positive evidence, it would have been absurd to suppose that the men of the company brought from the Mayflower's warm cabin, 55 women and children with at least three infants, to live on shore in midwinter before their first house had been *begun*, and when the toilers kept their muskets by them in constant dread of an Indian attack; when, too, the shelter of the ship was at their disposal, and not a few of both sexes were beginning to be disabled by a sickness already proving mortal.

The journal mentions that the working men were in part still lodging in the ship January 1st; on the 9th their first building had not received its roof; on the 14th those on board, being now the fewer, joined those on shore at worship, but on the 15th a storm kept them from going on shore to work; on the 26th their "common goods" were landed; finally, on March 21st, three months after Mr. Gay's alleged "final" landing of "the whole company," their journal says:

"This day, with much ado, we got our carpenter that had long been sick of the scurvy, to fit our shallop and FETCH ALL from on board."

So there was *no* general landing. Dec. 20th "about 20" began to live on shore; at the close of the 25th, the number had not increased; January 14th, the shore party was only somewhat the larger; as houses were ready, more came from the ship; and on March 21st, the last of the community was brought to land.

Nearly a century and a half afterward, one of the great events involved was to be selected for perpetual commemoration. The initial landing at Plymouth seemed fittest for the purpose. In 1741, the good Elder Faunce had solemnly identified Plymouth Rock, and had there in a peculiarly affecting manner, repeated to the assembly what the Forefathers themselves had told him concerning the landing upon it. The last of that exploring party was John Howland, who did not die till Faunce was 27 years old; and at least twelve of the Mayflower's passengers survived Howland. Many of Elder Faunce's audience were active in 1769, and in the light of what he had given them so directly, they found it true that the first landing of the Pilgrims at Plymouth was during their exploration of Dec. 11th, and was on Plymouth Rock. Mourt's Relation would have given them the same fact as a matter of record when interpreted by their knowlege of the local topography, but it is not probable that a copy of the book was then to be found in all the Old Colony.

But how is it to be inferred from the record, that the tradition is true as to the use made of that particular rock? The harbor-front of Plymouth has no ledges, and it is so shelving by nature that the Pilgrims must have found their heavy shallop unable, at most points, to approach near enough for them to land without wading in the wintry sea. In a space of several miles, there was just one large rock in sight, and that was a boulder brought from afar by some ancient iceberg; it weighed near half-a-dozen tons, and as it lay at the water's edge, its flattish surface, perhaps three yards square, invited them to pass over it dry-shod to the adjacent corn-fields, whose treeless expanse must have been noticeable even from Clark's Island. The record practically says that they then visited that spot; direct tradition says that they used this rock as a landing-place, and topography joins common-sense in confirming the tradition.

The article under review contains several errors of detail, which are here unnoticed because not essentially connected with Mr. Gay's great question—"Who, then, landed at Plymouth Rock on the

21st of December, 1620" (N. S.)? He answers—"Nobody." But history, tradition and geography, combine in replying that then and there, the geological pilgrim in question, became a "stepping-stone" for Myles Standish, John Carver, William Bradford, Edward Winslow, John Tilley, Edward Tilley, John Howland, Richard Warren, Stephen Hopkins, Edward Dotey, John Allerton and Thomas English, twelve signers of the Pilgrim Compact; and that with them were John Clark and Robert Coppin, master's-mates of the Mayflower, with four of their crew. This great fact is not to be shaken by any skilful manufacturer of "historic doubts"; it is founded on a Rock in more senses than one.

JOHN A. GOODWIN.

P. S.—As to the error of dating "Forefathers' Day" Dec. 22d, N. S., instead of 21st, the explanation is simple; but perhaps the matter is of enough interest to justify a preliminary examination. In A. D. 325, the calendar was set right. The world then went on allowing 365 1-4 days to each year, which was an over-allowance of 11 min. 10 1-4 sec. This small error became so large by constant growth, that in 725, the calendar was between three and four days behind the true reckoning as shown by the sun. At the Norman invasion the difference had increased to six days; at the discovery of America by Columbus, it was nine days. In 1582, the pope finding his fixed observances then falling ten days behind their seasons, called upon his philosophers for a remedy. By their advice ten d ys were added to the calendar, and future errors guarded against by this rule: "Years ending with two ciphers are not to be leap years, except when the number is an exact multiple of 400." The new system was soon adopted by the nations of continental Europe, save Russia and Turkey. It has, however, been found that even by this method, the calendar would be a day behind at about the year 5500; and the imminent disaster has been relegated to an exceedingly remote future, by this addition to the above rule: "When a year is an exact multiple of 4000, it is not to be a leap-year."

The English are reputed formerly to have been a people strongly inclined to their own ways, a trait which may account for their retaining their erroneous calendar in preference to countenancing an innovation. Hence, when the Pilgrim explorers first landed on Plymouth Rock, their English reckoning made the day December 11th, 1620; but the sun then reaching his winter solstice, showed it to really be the 21st. By making a leap-year of 1700, this national miscount was increased to eleven days. At length, in 1752, by order of parliament, the new calendar was adopted for Great Britain and her colonies, by calling the day next after September 2d the 14th.

Matters of that sort were rarely studied in those days, even by educated men. It is altogether probable that in 1769, not a person in the Old Colony knew much more of the case than that the old style had been turned into the European new style, by the addition of eleven days. So they most easily fell into the error of supposing this allowance of eleven days to be what the mathematicians call a "constant quantity," which would bring all old dates to the new reckoning prescribed by law. Is it impertinent to ask if the educated men of to-day have a much clearer idea of the subject? The day which by the old calendars appears as December 11th, would by the corrected reckoning be as follows for the successive centuries:—

A. D. 325	11th	A. D. 1220	18th
420	12th	1320	19th
520	13th	1420	20th
620	14th	1520	21st
720	15th	**1620**	**21st**
820	15th	1720	22d
920	16th	1820	23d
1020	17th	1920	24th
1120	18th	2020	24th

J. A. G.

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stand fast, and hold the traditions which ye have been taught, whether by word or our epistle."—(*Thessalonians* 2, 15.)

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